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Guerrilla Memory

Street Art and Play Engraving the Memory of Martyrs in Urban Spaces

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Titolo in italiano: Guerriglia della memoria. Come la Street Art e il gioco possono inscrivere la memoria dei martiri negli spazi pubblici

Abstract**:** This paper introduces the concept of *guerrilla memory* as a strategy for transmitting historical memory that: 1) makes use of unconventional communication techniques, 2) moves the space/time dedicated to the memory in everyday life and 3) focuses on a humanized take on the events, often embodied by one or more martyrs. The paper, after introducing this concept, offers background on the semiotic studies of urban spaces and memory, thereby delimiting a framework of analysis. This framework is then applied to several case studies: three dealing with street art (the murals dedicated to Giusepper Prono by Zerocalcare, the Stolpertein by the German artist Gunter Demning and the Memorial Bridge situated in Rijeka, Croatia) and three with games and play (the digital game *September 12*, the historical re–enactment of a Nazi raid in Venaria and the larp *Ultimo Covo*). The conclusions focus on how these systems offer several enticing and novel tools for the transmission of memory.

Keywords**:** Urban Semiotics, Semiotics of Memory, Street Art, Urban Games, Martyrs.

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1. Introduction[1]

This paper aims to investigate how unconventional strategies for the transmission of memory can be implemented in city spaces. While the most traditional way of conserving memory revolves around specific places connected with the events or specific recurrences that often mark the anniversary of those events, what we might call *guerrilla memory* tends to escape these traditional approaches. The "guerrilla" in our definition is not necessarily indicative of a grassroots approach (although that is often the case) but is related to the fact that it proposes a different strategy for transmitting memory. In contrast to other strategies, the efficacy of these actions does not derive from an effect of indexicality due to a direct space/time connection with the events of the past — an effect that is not unproblematic, as it evades the question of the *intentio auctoris* which, as Surace (2018) has claimed, is unavoidable even in the most "transparent" of documentaries. Rather, these actions derive their efficacy from their ability to engage their "readers" in novel forms of interaction, to mix languages and defy expectations, to invade spaces that are not traditionally allocated to the transmission of memory.

The two key concepts driving our analysis are that of city and martyr. The city, at the center of the massive process of urbanization that is reshaping anthropic environments, is currently the cardinal center of social and cultural representations and therefore an often–preferred stage for strategies of memory. The second concept, that of martyr, is connected to the fact that guerrilla memory often carries out an actorialization of ideologies and events in the effort to make them more relatable and human. The martyr is thus understood as the embodiment and testimony of history, a figure that is repeatedly represented in the performances and texts that enact strategies of guerrilla memory.

1. This paper was written together by both authors. For the formal attribution, please considers sections 1,2 and 4.2 to have been written by Mattia Thibault and sections 3, 4.1 and 5 to have been written by Antonio Opromolla.

The next two sections are therefore dedicated to outlining the methodological background we have adopted in relation to the semiotic features of memory, martyrdom and urban spaces. The fourth section focuses on the analysis of several case studies, while the last one is used to draw some conclusions.

2. Urban Semiotics

In 1980 Michel de Certeau claimed that the city can be understood as a text. According to de Certeau, urban space is a complex text which is constantly actualized and transformed by the practices of its citizens. The inhabitants *enunciate* the city by crossing it and interacting with it. They metaphorically "read it out loud" and, therefore, own it and fill it with their own subjectivity. The textual nature of the city, according to de Certeau, is highly dynamic: it is the result of innumerable practices of enunciation that actualize and shape it.

In a way, the idea of the city as a text is already somewhat implicit in the expression "urban fabric", echoing the etymology of text as "textus", that is, something woven, such as a piece of cloth. Both the city and the text emerge from the thick co–presence of several meaningful elements, the complex interactions among these elements and the nodes they form.

Urban semiotics focuses precisely on this similarity — and on de Certeau's insight — to assert the heuristic value of approaching cities as texts. Cities are not exactly texts, that would be an oversimplification; however, they can be understood and analysed as such. Volli (2008), for example, claims that from a semiotic point of view, an expressive reality such as the city that is renewed and continually redefines itself is defined as discourse: a signifying practice which, however, projects a text behind itself at all times. The city is alive, it changes materially and in the sense that it projects; at any given moment, however, it is as stable and legible as a book.

If we investigate the authorial dimension of the city, it is clear that we are dealing with a text which is inevitably *polyphonic*, the result of millions of interventions, enunciations and writings, ultimately eluding any attempt at standardization by the political, economic or religious powers. The momentary instance of a city contains the contributions of countless authors, eras and conceptions of urban spaces, layers and layers of meaning superimposed on each other throughout history.

These writings move at different speeds: some elements of the city can last for thousands of years (the topography, the layout of the street map), others for centuries (buildings, streets and monuments), others for years (signs and pieces of street furniture) or weeks (posters and shop windows), down to the momentary presence of the inhabitants themselves: any look at the city thus essentially captures just one section of it (Volli 2008).

Nevertheless, the city (just like a text) can be understood as an organic whole and labelled as a unique thing, despite the fact that, formed as it is of numerous smaller–scale texts (neighborhoods, streets, buildings, signs, street furniture, graffiti, etc.), it is characterized by an irreducible structural heterogeneity. On the one hand, all of these smaller texts are interconnected by the fact of being simultaneously present in the city, and their meaning is also determined by their presence in a specific place in the city as well as their relationship with the other urban texts. On the other hand, the meaning of the city itself is constructed like that of a web of meaningful elements connected to each other (Volli 2005). This is obviously an unstable and uncertain mingling, the metamorphoses of which reflect different times and rhythms, from the slow construction of new neighborhoods to the quick work of street–writers and the ephemeral appearance of advertising posters.

The dual nature of the city — homogeneous text and collection of smaller textualities — ultimately blurs the distinction between text and context (Lotman 1998; Cervelli and Sedda 2006). If the larger–size elements can become the context for those they incorporate

(a neighborhood becomes the context of a building, a square that of a monument), the reverse is also possible. Objects which are smaller in size but possessed of greater symbolic efficacy often become the context for larger–scale objects: "iconic" buildings and monuments are able to lessen the meaning of all that it is around them, creating a semiotic void that allows them to "shine".

This kaleidoscopic web of meaningful elements thus features its own hierarchies. Forms of ideological stratification grant greater emphasis and meaning to the buildings of political and religious power, to monuments and "landmarks" while instead relegating to a marginal role the communicative traces of most of the city's inhabitants; these latter can only count on their ephemeral presence or recur to billboards, signs, or graffiti.

Authorial power over the city is not always shared in a peaceful way. Petrified in buildings and streets, frozen in a spatial arrangement, the city contains traces of political, social and cultural tensions and power struggles. The elements of the city are pervaded by an antagonistic tension: competing to achieve dominant positions (centrality, verticality, passages — such as Bologna's towers or the competition between the Chrysler Building and the Empire State Building in Manhattan), attention (traffic, such as shopping centers attempting to lure citizens with air conditioning and music) and prestige. These elements are not fixed; rather, they are subject to teleological historiographies celebrating certain periods and iconoclastic attempts to erase others, such as with the destruction of statues that follows every regime change.

The city is a representation of the society that inhabits it, and the different actors in said society will attempt to direct this representation, to engrave themselves onto it. The city is a text not only in the sense of a fabric (*textus)* but also in the sense of a witness (*testis*): it is an account of the history and values of a society, and acting on that account is an attempt to shape the society of tomorrow.

While the city is unquestionably the product of a culture, at the same time it is also itself a *producer of culture*. There is a city–enunci-

ated but also a city–enunciator, which produces meaning and talks about the society and the people who inhabit it. The meaningful elements of the city profoundly influence the actions of their inhabitants through obligations, prohibitions and directions. On the other hand, cities transform people into citizens: they make them *urban* and *polite* — words that come from the Latin and Greek words for "city" respectively.

The city therefore lies at the center of many attempts to enact memory strategies, strategies that focus on historical events, values or people connoting a particular ideology and use them to engrave such ideology onto the city text and, therefore, onto its citizens.

3. Semiotics, Memory and Martyrs

The creation of a shared, collective memory (Halbwachs 1992) is one possible semiotic relationship with the past that ranges from censorship (Bernoussi 2015) to nostalgia (Leone 2015) and can take on many forms involving the re–enunciation and retrieval of past instances of innovation (Marino 2017). Moreover, "memory" is usually connected to "identity" and "culture", since reviving memory entails rebuilding the boundaries of cultural identity (Ricoeur 2000). This identity is what Lotman has called "semiosphere", that is to say, the set of signs circulating in a cultural system.

Focusing on semiotics' contribution to memory, Cristina Demaria (2006, pp. 11–17) stresses the need to connect semiotics to the social and anthropological sciences in addressing challenges related to memory issues. She identifies two main kinds of contributions. On the one hand, semiotics can highlight the processes of signification of a culture and the processes of self–representation of a society by focusing on their "collective" dimension. In relation to this point, Umberto Eco (1976, p. 298) claimed that the nature of semiotics includes a cultural dimension since processes of signification cannot be explained outside the cultural logic in which they

are produced; in this sense, according to Eco, semiotics is the analysis of the social implications of a culture. These considerations are particularly important for the semiotics of memory, since memory can be understood to structure the cultural dimension as well as social values and logics. Indeed, memory is the (diachronic) way of developing and transmitting the contents' culture. However, according to Anna Maria Lorusso (2013, pp. 3–13), memory must be considered a dynamic filter which continuously redefines its contents by reformulating the attributes of cultural identity, thereby becoming a source of change.

On the other hand, semiotics features tools of textual analysis through which we can study the multiple texts produced to convey the memory of specific events. In this sense, Demaria (2006, p. 14) affirms that "the context speaks through the text", since the latter represents a form of expression of the general culture and memory. Considerations similar to Demaria's can also be found in the work of Maria Patrizia Violi (2016, pp. 262–275) focused on the way semiotics contributes to the analysis of "texts of the memory". These texts are approached as semiotic objects with specific plans of expression and content (for example images, movies, physical installations, monuments, memorials, etc.). In relation to this contribution, it is important to point out that Violi focuses on physical spaces as one of the most frequent ways of displaying memory, treating them as places capable of preserving and passing on the past. In particular she uses the term "trauma site" to indicate the locations of past traumatic events that are now accessed and visited in formalized ways as a specific social practice.

Violi (2014, pp. 48–51) also addresses how the experiences of visitors to trauma sites are designed, distinguishing in particular between a "representative logic" and a "re–presentative logic". The first provides distance between the visitor and the traumatic event represented at the site; in this logic, the traumatic event is something that belongs to the past and can only be known by the visitor. "Re–present logic" aims to trigger synesthetic involvement on the

part of the visitor, creating a direct connection with the site and the traumatic event. This grants the visitor a totalizing and emotional experience. Ebru Erbaş Gürler and Başak Özer (2013, pp. 858–863) also stress these aspects by arguing that the general trend is towards the second approach and the fact that memorial spaces are present in urban spaces makes it possible to establish visitors' empathy with these events by focusing on integrating memory into people's daily lives. The objective is to introduce the visitor to specific narrative programs about the past and renew them during his or her routine activities. In order to do so, it is fundamental that the memorial focus on the victims and their specific story to better bring viewers into touch with the events.

The figure of the "martyr" is central to many strategies of memory and guerrilla memory for the same reason. The thematic role of the "martyr" triggers a complex semantic universe. It consists of an actor who suffers and experiences a penalty, which ends in his/her death at the hands of a persecutor. The martyr is not purely a victim, however. Rather, martyrs are people who sacrifice themselves and whose sacrifice ought to be remembered. Through their deaths, such figures cease to be individuals and instead become the symbol of the ideology, religion or cause that they embodied.

Two elements can be seen in this definition. The first is that martyrdom comprises not only a thematic role, but also a pathemic role in that it corresponds to the personification of a specific passion, referring to the intimate, interior state of the actor. The second element is that "martyr" transcends religious aspects, including a specific period or general event during which the martyr suffered a penalty by virtue of his or her own ideology or state. For a more specific definition of "martyr" please see Middleton (2011) and Mitchell (2012), both of whom focus on "martyrdom" as a conflict story that represents the symbol of the community's vision, desires and hopes.

4. Martyrs in Urban Spaces

In the previous sections, we have defined the city as the center of a number of strategies for inscribing values, events and ideologies into its material structure. Memory is no exception. Statues, plates, monuments, flowers and parades are dedicated to celebrating and passing down the memory of historical events, struggles, conquests, fights for independence and so on.

Cities, after museums and historical sites, are some of the main places for implementing strategies of memory. This is due not only to the fact that they are often historical sites themselves, but also to the semiotic features described above. The enunciated city is a self–representation of society, and therefore a perfect setting for representing memory as well. The enunciator city, on the other hand, shapes its citizens and can therefore operate as an engine for transmitting and passing on memory.

The study of the roles city monuments play in the creation of a collective memory is certainly nothing new (see *e.g.* Nelson and Olin 2003). In the next sections, we instead focus on what we call *guerrilla memory*, a specific strategy focusing on peculiar and innovative kinds of intervention in urban spaces: namely street art and urban games.

4.1 Martyrs in Street Art

Street art is a type of visual art found in public spaces. It can be considered a mix of different artistic–oriented phenomena occurring in urban spaces (for example, graffiti, physical installations, sculptures, etc.) the result of which, as stated by Mastroianni (2013) is to produce an aesthetic rewriting of the city and a regeneration of urban spaces. City elements are employed for artistic purposes and take on a value which is different from the one for which they were produced (from a "practical" valorization to a "ludic"/"aesthetic" valorization). At the same time, street art has specific social meanings. In this context, memory is able to adopt innovative languages and

to bring the past back to life in new environments so as to involve new audiences. At this point we explore three case studies in order to reveal these elements.

The first example is the murals dedicated to the *partigiano* (member of the Italian resistance during World War II) Giuseppe Prono located in Montanaro, a small city in North–West Italy (see fig. 1). These murals were commissioned by public institutions, entrusted to the Italian cartoonist Zerocalcare and realized by a team of writers. While murals are quite a classical form of institutional memorialization (across time and political spectra), there are two elements of this work which characterize it as an example of *guerrilla memory*. First, the choice to commission a well–known cartoonist to design the piece and have it painted in his distinctive style is a clear attempt to appeal to a certain demographics (so–called millennials, model readers of Zerocalcare comics who are generally already familiar with the author's work, mostly through the web) and characterize the murals as products of convergent culture (Jenkins 2006). Second, the murals were also "hijacked" in a certain sense, in that the authors made a small but substantial change to the original sketch: they added a red star, a clear reference to the fact that Prono was a communist. This attempt to also commemorate the political affiliation of the partisan unleashed a number of controversies and was even criticized by some institutions.

The mural consists of three parts. The central one is dedicated to the figure of the partisan who gazes directly at the viewer; it is located inside a balloon to indicate that is appearing as part of a dream in the mind of the character to the left of the mural. Text on the right side reads "Quando dormo sogno senza la punteggiatura e vedo gli occhi di Giuseppe senza la paura" ("When I sleep, I dream without punctuation and I see Giuseppe's eyes without fear"). One of the most important elements of this work is the chance for the viewer to identify with the character on the left side, a child sleeping in his bed. The fact that the mural is located in a school is particularly meaningful, since the aim of the author is to encourage children to

become familiar with the figure of this partisan and, most of all, to grant importance to his courage. This viewer (first subject) is represented in the text by his/her simulacrum, the child (second subject), and, following the logic of débrayage, this creates the universe of the martyr Giuseppe Prono (third subject) by defining a deep connection around the topic of "courage". The figurative character of the elements making up the second subject (*e.g.* the bed, bedside table, etc.) helps to strengthen this link. The theme of dreaming places the third subject even more deeply in an ideal universe the viewer is to reach. These characteristics are represented not only in the text, but also in the chosen means of representation, namely a wall. Generally, "wall" is synonymous with "boundary"; the act of redeveloping a non–valued and abandoned part of the city to launch a message of unity entails re–semantizing the function of the wall itself.

Figure 1. The mural by the Italian cartoonist Zerocalcare, dedicated to the partisan Giuseppe Prono and located in Montanaro.

The second example are German artist Gunter Demning's *Stolperteine*. This is not a single piece but rather a diffused artwork scattered across several European countries. It consists of thousands of

small, flat stones covered with brass plates indicating the names of people who were deported to Nazi death camps together with their dates of birth, deportation and death; the stones are incorporated into the pavement of city streets in front of the houses of the deported (see Fig. 2). The indexical connection with the locations from which Jewish people were deported is, however, only a (small) part of the semiotic mechanism put in motion by these *Stolperteine*. The main strategy for transmitting memory found in these artworks lies in their name: "stumbling stones" or "stumbling blocks". This expression evokes the random possibility of encountering — almost stumbling upon — a work of art and, by–extension, coming into contact with the past and memory. To this end, these stones manipulate viewers: their chromatic characteristics, different from the rest of the urban pavement, make them more visible; they are objects that "want to be seen" and to "seduce" viewers. The people who see this artwork are not mere viewers, therefore; they become participating actors playing an active role in the piece. They are obliged to lower their gaze, perhaps to bend over, and they can interact with the artwork in that the blocks can be touched, stepped on, or covered. This work requires a synesthetic involvement that potentially involves the viewer's entire body.

Similarly, the names and dates engraved on the stones are not only a way of conveying information. On the contrary, they are a means of highlighting the unknown. The pathemic dimension of these artefacts stems from a negation of the narrative program present in the text of the stone. The punctual elements engraved in the blocks deny actual information about the victim, leading viewers to begin wondering who these martyrs were, what they did before being deported, what they were doing in that house and how they died. This is an example of "diffused" memory, fragments of memory put into the paths of people in everyday life that lead visitors to think: "I am here, they were here. From here they took them away and they never came back here". Moreover, the possibility for viewers to have the same experience in the multiple different cities where

the stones are placed potentially generates a sense of connection, a network of memory that concerns not only a single victim but all the martyrs of the Shoa.

Figure 2. *Stolperteine* by the German artist Gunter Demning.

The last example of urban art for guerrilla memorial purposes that we will analyze is the *Memorial Bridge* situated in Rijeka, Croatia (see Fig. 3). It is dedicated to the soldiers who died during the Croatian war of Independence and consists in a footbridge connecting the two parts of the Rijeka channel (while also connecting the historic city centre with the former port) that ends in two vertical panels that obstruct the view and passage, obliging citizens to walk in the narrow passage between them.

At first sight, a war memorial is a rather classic and institutionalised memory device. However, the manipulative force of this artefact, its agency, its ability to influence the path of its viewers and

to interrogate them is what makes it interesting. At the same time, this semiotic mechanism is enshrined in rich textuality, continually standing there in front of the viewers, based on the creation of contrasts and oppositions.

First, the monument is not completely integrated into the urban environment: the colours and type of the materials used to build it give it characteristics of minimalism, in contrast with the rest of the city.

Second, there is an opposition between the characteristics of the artworks' two elements, the bridge and the panels. This is an opposition between "vertical" and "horizontal" elements; between the "durativity" of the footbridge (since it requires walkers to follow a path to complete it) and the "punctuality" of the panel (since it requires people to stop in front of it); between the perception of "freedom" associated with the footbridge (since it allows walkers to cross an obstacle) and the sense of "constraint" created by the vertical panel (since it forces people to stand still and find a passage through it).

While these elements are, in a way, typical of any type of bridge — a bridge is, by nature, a source of junction and conflict, of continuity and boundary, of negotiation and opposition — the *Memorial Bridge* underlines and overplays them. The monument represents this set of different properties and elements, creating a space for this mix of perceptions and feelings in which people can carry out different kinds of activities: "using" the bridge individually or socially, reflecting on past events or the future, going at a slow or fast pace, etc.: these are also the characteristics of memory, which is made not of fixed elements but of multiple elements that evolve over time.

These three examples show how guerrilla memory is widely present in the physical spaces of cities, involving people through their daily activities, and how the city itself offers many different means and expressive languages for achieving this objective.

Figure 3. The *Memorial Bridge* in Rijeka, Croatia.

4.2 Martyrs and Urban Gamification

Games and playful activities might appear an unusual choice for the representation and transmission of memory, much less that of martyrs. It is not rare, however, for games to be created to commemorate historical events[2] or to remember and try to understand them[3]. Thanks to the efficacy of games in engaging players and their statutory interactivity, they are often used in *guerrilla memory*.

Before moving on to our case–studies, however, it might be useful to focus briefly on the semiotic features of play and the way the movement of play (as a modelling system) in the semiosphere influences its relationship with memory.

2. One of many possible examples is Valiant Hearts published in 2014 by Ubisoft Montpellier and focusing on the 1st World War.

3. For example, *Progetto Ustica*, a 2018 virtual reality game by IV Productions dedicated to the Itavia Flight 870 massacre (see Salvador & Ferri 2018) or the 2016 game *Apollo 11 VR* dedicated to the moon landing (see Giuliana 2019).

Play is fairly difficult to define. Wittgenstein (1953) claims that such a definition is actually impossible, as the set of activities we define as "play" share only a *family resemblance* but no common characteristics. It would be more fruitful, then, to focus on the *playful behaviour* featured in these kinds of activities. Lotman (2011) states that such behaviour can be understood as a simultaneous compresence of a conventional behaviour and a practical behaviour. The conventional behaviour is that following some sort of make–believe or pretending: players interpret the world in an alternative way and act accordingly. The practical behaviour, however, indicates that the players are well aware of the fictional nature of their actions (even though they might not call it "play") and do not lose contact with reality. A child playing with a toy tiger, for example, will both act as if the tiger were real — and scary — and at the same time be perfectly aware that there is no real danger. This twofold interpretation means that play always carries out a re–semantization of the objects, places and people involved in play activity.

Play is a constant in all human cultures. In fact, play is pre–cultural: most animals are also capable of playing and play is fundamental for their development. Nevertheless, play as a modelling system is not always recognized as relevant. While some forms of play have been hegemonic since classical antiquity (athletics, sports), others have faced stigma and opposition. In the last few decades, however, we are witnessing a phenomenon of ludicization (Ortoleva 2012, Bonenfant & Genvo 2014) that involves shifting play towards the center of the semiosphere[4]. This entails new prestige and efficacy for play in western culture and has given rise to concepts such as *gamification*, *games for change*, *serious games*, etc. It is thanks to ludicisation that games are now seen as a viable strategy for passing on memory. However, this cultural paradigm change (Idone Cassone 2017) is not hegemonic and such a strategy sometimes ends up backfiring — as we will see in our third example.

4. For a more thorough description for this phenomenon please see Thibault (2016) and Thibault and Heljakka (2019).

Urban Gamification (Thibault 2019) is a perfect example of the ludicization of culture: more and more, cities are serving as the settings for *playful activities* (not necessarily games) that mingle with everyday life. This may occur as a form of entertainment (urban games such as Pokémon Go) but also political protest (through *flash mobs* or *parkour*) or to create moments of conviviality (*e.g. dinners in white*). And, of course, to implement strategies of memory.

Our first case study is an example not of urban gamification, but of representing urban spaces in a digital game. Although the representation of urban space it offers is very simple, we believe it is an interesting case study as it showcases the potential of games to create actions of guerrilla memory. The 2010 digital game *September 12: A Toy World* by Newsgaming is a handbook case for serious games and game–based learning. As the title makes quite clear, the game aims to offer an occasion for reflecting critically on the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 09/11. *September 12* features a Middle Eastern–looking city seen from high above. The players can easily see many civilians walking around among the buildings and, amongst these figures, a number of terrorists. The players can point at the terrorists with their mouse and shoot a missile at them that will destroy a small portion of the city and kill everyone in the blast radius. This is not a simple shooting game, however: whenever a civilian dies in a blast — a rather frequent occurrence, since the city is very crowded — several other civilians will cry over the body of the deceased… and transform into terrorists.

The main game mechanic is thus quite simple: the more the player bombards the city trying to kill terrorists, the more terrorists will spawn, in a spiral that can only be counterproductive. It is an obvious critique of the so–called "war on terror" and its dubious efficacy. What is interesting, first of all, is that this game places the idea of martyr at the center of the gameplay: every civilian casualty becomes a witness to the ferocity of the West and a call to join terrorist groups. The American rhetoric of the "war on terror" was also based on martyrdom, but here the perspective is inverted: the

martyrs are not (only) the innocent Americans who died on 9/11, but also the innocent Iraqis and Afghans who died because of the retaliation wars.

Although this game is not set in a real city, the representation of urban spaces is central to it as it does represent not simply a middle eastern city transformed into a warzone, but the entire society. As real cities are both self–representations of society and witnesses of its history, in this case the digital city becomes a sort of index of a society that has been laid to ruin and is filled with terrorists because of the war.

The power of the game as a strategy of memory and critical thinking stems, however, from the way the players interact. On the one hand, the players can do what "feels natural", that is, they can interact with the game as they would with any shooter game, following the opportunities offered by the gunsight on their screen. In that case they will slowly realize that what they are doing is only exacerbating the situation and that there is no way of winning the game. In this way, *September 12* is a simple — yet critical — representation of the Afghan and Iraqi wars. On the other hand, the players might choose to explore another possibility. The game instructions inform them that they can chose not to shoot (Fig. 4). This goes against the interactive nature of games, but if the players agree to be simple spectators, then the city will not be bombed, the buildings will not be destroyed and there will be no martyrs creating new terrorists. Refusing to play the game allows players to explore a counterfactual history, "what if the war never happened", but in order to do this, they must relinquish their ability to intervene. This alternative ending does not endanger memory, however; on the contrary, it tries to find a lesson in it.

This first case study, being a digital game, does not make any use of physical space — which is often at the center of many strategies of memory — and does not have a re–presentative level. The other examples, however, are forms of pervasive play (Montola et al. 2009): play activities that blend into everyday society and involve by-

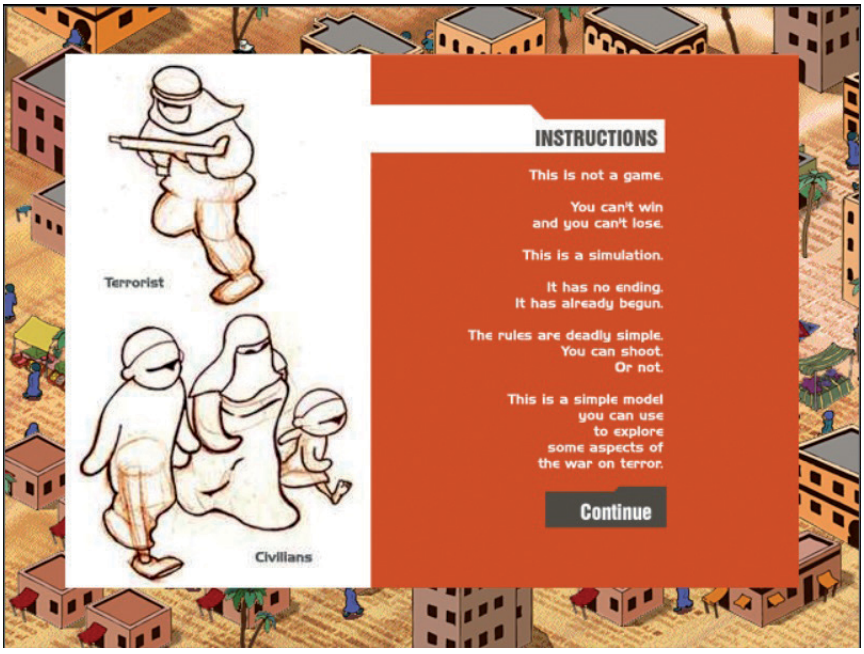

Figure 4. A visual interface of the game *September 12: A Toy World*.

standers in the ludic endeavor. In these cases, the relationship with urban spaces is closer and the city is used not as a representation, but as a surface upon which memory should be engraved.

Our second case study is the historical re–enactment of a Nazi raid at the market of Venaria, an Italian city near Turin. The performance was organized by the municipality for the International Holocaust Remembrance Day 2019. In this re–enactment, several men in SS uniforms escorted a diverse group of people wearing ragged clothes and Stars of David across the busy marketplace and enclosed them in a nearby, empty school. The event had a quite positive response from the bystanders and the mayor underlined that the re–enactment was intended not to "put on a show" but to help people better understand and remember what happened[5].

5. An article by newspaper *La Stampa* reporting the event is available at http://bit.ly/RaidVenaria (this website and all the others mentioned herein were last accessed on July 29, 2019).

The playful character of this event — based on the use of costumes, role–playing and the pretend nature of the participants' actions — might not be as obvious as in our first case study[6]. However, the efficacy of such an act is based mainly on the interpretative disorientation of the bystanders, who need a few moments to understand that what they are witnessing *is not real*. This disorientation is engaging, however, and has significant symbolic efficacy (cf. Turco 2012). The martyrs, in this case, come back to life, their unexpected presence triggering memory and remembrance.

Our last case study is also a historical re–enactment in a way, but one that was received in a very different way. *Ultimo Covo* is a live–action role–play game (larp) by the Italian collective *Terre Spezzate* dedicated to re–enacting the kidnapping of NATO general James Lee Dozier by the *Brigate Rosse*, a communist terrorist organization operating in Italy in the 1970s and 1980s. More than 30 people participated as players in this larp[7], playing the roles of policemen and terrorists, common citizens and engaged students. The organizers of *Ultimo Covo*, despite occupying a clearly left–wing position, claim that the larp was not in any way meant to justify terrorism and that it instead aimed to represent the events as faithfully as possible and to humanise to all the people involved.

The larp was run for two weekends and took place in the small town of Bobbio Pellice, where part of the urban space was entirely designated as play area and separated from the rest of the city.

Scholars generally recognize that the efficacy of larps lies in the empathy they can produce in players, as players have the chance to

6. Probably some of the participants would not define it as "play", because of the negative connotations that the concept sometimes carries (that of being silly or childish). This, however, would not contradict the playful character of the activity, as the participants are perfectly aware that they are not SS/deportees but act *as if* they were.

7. A video made by the organizers showing some salient moments of the game can be found at http://bit.ly/UltimoCovoVid.

"live" the events in someone else's shoes and to see them with their own eyes, albeit through the proxy of a *persona* created for the occasion. The response of the participants was enthusiastic[8]: playing the same role for two consecutive days and "living" the events purportedly made them feel more empathic and more connected to the events. Role–play was able to transform someone else's memories into the memories of the players, memories that were reconstructed and re–enacted but still had the power to deeply affect the participants.

Nonetheless, the larp suffered of a great deal of backlash. First, some Police Union representatives and the Chief State's Attorney of Turin, Armando Spataro, and subsequently several newspapers[9], accused *Ultimo Covo* of being disrespectful and "stupid". The game was associated with childish play, but also accused of representing an apologia and being offensive. In particular, many claimed that the victims of the Brigate Rosse — the real martyrs of that period[10] — were insulted and disrespected by the players.

These accusations are a clear sign that the ludicization of culture is far from hegemonic and that, while some individuals find it absolutely unproblematic to accept that larps are often used as ways of experiencing and reflecting on complex issues, for others the idea of "play" is still imbued with many negative meanings and cannot be associated with something as delicate as memory.

To recapitulate, in this section we have engaged with several ways in which urban games (or games representing urban spaces) can be used as strategies of guerrilla memory. In all of these cases, the "pretend" nature of play liberates them from the need for a material or spatial

8. Several instances of feedback and an outline of the background of the entire story were published here: http://bit.ly/UltimoCovoWitness.

9. A selection can be found at: http://bit.ly/UltimoCovoSecolo, http://bit.ly/UltimoCovoQuotNet and http://bit.ly/UltimoCovoStampa.

10. The General Dozier himself survived the kidnapping, but the *other* victims of Red Terrorism were often mentioned as being disrespected and insulted by the very existence of such a game.

connection with the "trauma sites", as it exploits players' re–semantizations (the conventional behavior described by Lotman) to help them internalize the events of the past and render them contemporary. On the other hand, games require some form of interaction (or abstinence from interaction!), which creates deeper connections between the events and the players, again reinforcing the creation of memory.

Conclusions

This paper has set out to show how guerrilla memory avoids being a "fixed" element to read or access in dedicated spaces, instead paving the way for strategies of memory transmission based in our everyday lives. In particular, we have seen that the efficacy of these strategies derives from the fact that memory is liberated from specialized places to mingle with everyday urban life: citizens and passers–by become involuntarily participants in these actions, diffused and disseminated throughout the urban fabric.

Urban spaces, thanks to the richness of their signs, are the perfect places to host strategies of guerrilla memory. Within them, texts devoted to transmitting memory almost vanish amidst the polyphonic variety only to shine with meaning when activated.

The case studies we have briefly analyzed are just a few of the many semiotic tools available to guerrilla memory: the re–semantisizing acts of the mural, the sparks of memory created by the stumbling–stones, the interruption of everyday life enacted by the bridge as well as the new modes of interaction, role–play and immersion offered by games.

Finally, our analyses have confirmed the importance of the figure of the martyr in *guerrilla memory* through the ability of this thematic and pathemic role to humanize history. While the effect of indexicality that is at the foundation of most traditional forms of cultural memory transmission serves to bring the viewer and the object of the memory itself closer, this is not possible in guerrilla memory, as the indexicality is often broken or downplayed. The martyr, therefore, becomes an

essential semiotic device used to create a sense of relatedness and proximity. Actorializing memory in a human figure is not necessarily meant to create an example to follow (this is certainly not the case in *September 12*) or to embody certain values (the victims of the Shoa engraved in the Stumbling Stones are not signs of any specific virtue). Rather, they are a way of engaging viewers, of immersing them in a narrative and therefore enabling and facilitating the transmission of memory. Nevertheless, the sacrality that still surrounds the victimhood of martyrs must be handled carefully: some forms of representations and interaction can be perceived as a violation of the memory and, despite creators' best intentions, have the potential to trigger a strong backlash (as we saw with the reactions to *Ultimo Covo*).

Finally, this research raises several questions deserving of additional study, in particular regarding the effects of these operations. Even limiting ourselves to the examples analyzed here, we can see that memory is often opposed, be it by attempts to destroy the elements that embody it (Zerocalcare's mural was vandalized, some Stolpersteine have been removed and stolen), or by negating the perspective they express (again, the red star on the mural, or the adoption of the perspective of Brigate Rosse in *Ultimo Covo*). Memory is also weaponized, using a rhetoric of respect to oppose modes of expression that are not considered hegemonic (*Ultimo Covo,* again, and the idea that you should not "play with the dead"). At the same time, the sometimes–conflicting emotional responses to performances such as the historical re–enactment or buildings such as Rijeka's bridge also warrant further investigation.

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